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Community and technical colleges and public four-year universities join forces on Smarter Balanced Assessment

OLYMPIA – Washington 11th graders who score at a college-ready level on new assessments this spring will automatically place into college-level math and English language classes when they enroll in college, thanks to a statewide agreement announced today by Washington’s community and technical colleges and public four-year universities.

The agreement applies to students who score at the top two levels – levels four and three – on the new “Smarter Balanced Assessments” that will be given to all Washington 11th-graders this spring. Those students will be able to skip the standard placement tests – such as Accuplacer – that are typically given when students enroll in college.

The “Smarter Balanced Assessments” will measure whether 11th-graders are on-track toward meeting Common Core State Standards, rigorous new math and English language arts standards aimed at preparing students to be college and career ready. Most states, including Washington, have adopted the new standards to eliminate state-to-state disparities in education and to advance educational attainment in the nation overall.

Proponents say the agreement sends a strong message that Washington’s public colleges and universities support the Smarter Balanced Assessments and Common Core State Standards.

“The Smarter Balanced Assessments will give 11th graders a much-needed heads up on whether they’ll place into math and English language courses in college, or whether they’re headed toward remedial classes instead,” said Bill Moore, director of K-12 partnerships at the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. “Students then have their senior year to either catch up or take even more advanced classes.”

Paul Francis, executive director of the Council of Presidents, the organization representing the public baccalaureates, said the agreement urges students to stay ambitious their senior year.

“Students who score higher on the Smarter Balanced Assessments shouldn’t stop there,” said Francis. “This agreement urges these students to aim high and take courses in high school that qualify for college credit, like Advanced Placement or other college-credit courses.”

Colleges, universities and high schools are also designing math and English language arts transition courses to get today’s high school juniors up-to-speed next year if they don’t fare well on the Smarter Balanced Assessment this spring. Several high schools are already piloting the curriculum, which will serve as a second chance for seniors: Those who earn a B or above in the classes will be prepared for the same entry-level college math and English Language courses as students who scored at level 3 on the Smarter Balanced Assessments their junior year, and will also be able to bypass placement testing at many colleges.

The transition courses are being developed by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and participating universities with a \$3.2 million grant from College Spark Washington. The goal is for these courses to rapidly expand statewide.

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